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The challenge of an empty space: Pedagogical and multimodal interaction in drama lessons

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Abstract

Problem Statement: What challenges do teacher trainees face in pedagogic and multimodal interaction during drama lessons?

Purpose of Study: The challenges of pedagogic and multimodal interaction between teacher and student were examined, thereby developing practices in teacher education of drama. **Research Methods:** Stimulated recall-interviews were conducted with the help of a video that was recorded during teacher practice sessions in spring 2011. The interviewees (N=7) were students studying to become class teachers. The interviewer and the interviewees watched previously selected video clips together and discussed the classroom interaction. **Findings:** The study shows that pedagogic and multimodal interaction of a drama lesson is challenging for the teacher trainees. According to the data analysis, class teacher students pointed out five main elements that make interaction in classroom drama teaching challenging: teacher's actions; educational organization; the nature of the subject; students, and resources. The five main categories included several sub-categories. This study focuses on the three first elements: teacher's actions, organization of the educational situation, and the nature of the subject. **Conclusions:** The teacher trainees found the interaction in drama work to be challenging. Drama work is a free form of education, making controlling the group or individual students more difficult. The interviewees lacked confidence in their own actions, subject knowledge, non-verbal communication and teaching skills. The feeling of inadequacy was also connected to the management of students and the group.

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Keywords: Drama education; classroom drama; group factors; teacher education; trainee teacher; Finnish teacher education

1. Introduction

This study is a part of an extensive research project that is focused on the classroom drama teaching practices (Rantala, 2008; Toivanen, Rantala & Ruismäki, 2009; Toivanen, Komulainen & Ruismäki, 2011; Pyykkö, 2010; Toivanen, Pyykkö & Ruismäki, 2011, Antikainen, 2012). The research project attempts to build theory-based models that could be used in teacher education, especially in teaching practices, to direct trainee teachers. Drama education (*classroom drama*) is defined as both an art subject and a teaching method. Classroom drama uses

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elements of the theatre art form for educational purposes for students of all ages. It incorporates elements of theatre to facilitate the student's cognitive, physical, social and emotional development and learning. Classroom drama is a multisensory mode of teaching and learning (Neelands, 1984; Bolton, 1998, 198–200; Toivanen, 2012).

In the Finnish and Nordic pedagogical tradition, pedagogical interaction is divided into two parts. Teaching includes both the didactic (teaching) and pedagogic (relation to students) side. Teaching can be divided into pre-pedagogical interaction (*planning, goals*), pedagogical interaction (*instructions, directions, structured lessons, and teaching methods*) and post-pedagogical interaction (*feedback and reflection*) (Kansanen & Meri, 1999). In the Anglo-American tradition, this knowledge is usually named content and pedagogy (Tirri, 2012, 57). The multimodality is connected to pedagogical interaction and includes teacher's actions in teaching situation; vocal acts (*instructions, questions, concepts, tone and strength of voice*) and visuospatial actions (*gestures, facial expressions, body posture and use of space*) (Stivers & Sindell, 2005). In Finnish teacher education, the pedagogical relation between the teacher and the students (group) is understood to be necessary from a young person's point of view; it aims to draw out the person's best. It is interactive and a student cannot be forced into it (Kansanen, 2009; Toom & Husu, 2012). It is important because the goal of education is to support the development of the whole person, not only the cognitive domain (Finnish National core Curriculum for Comprehensive School, 2003).

Pedagogical interaction between the teacher and the students is very complex in real life teaching-studying-learning situations. The potential complexity and diversity of creative processes in the classroom drama make it even more challenging for trainee or novice teachers. According to Clark and Peterson (1986, 269–277 see Aaltonen and Pitkäniemi, 2001; Kansanen, 2009), the teacher's interactive pedagogical thinking in an actual teaching situation is focused on four categories: educational goals and objectives, teaching content, actual teaching processes and procedures, as well as the target of teaching—the pupils. The last two categories—the procedures of teaching and the students—have been found to be more present in teachers' thinking. Teaching trainees are mainly novice teachers with little practical experience. Teacher's pedagogical thinking content has been studied by comparing differences between experienced (expert) and inexperienced (novice) teachers (Westerman, 1991; Jyrhämä, 2002; Hogan, Rabinowitz & Carven III, 2003). According to Jyrhämä (2002, 74), the expert teacher is assumed to have information that novices do not have. Expert teachers' professional knowledge is implicit. To become an expert teacher is a long-term process, because the essence of the teaching process is complex and the management of such complexities requires time. Experienced teachers are more able to identify the relevant factors of complex and mixed teaching situations. Teaching situations also require the ability to apply personal practical pedagogical theories. Through experience, the teacher accumulates sensitivity to the teaching situation.

Lacking experience, novice teachers (trainee teachers) rely more on guidelines and operating principles. An experienced teacher will inevitably accumulate routines, which are considered as a resource to deal with sudden events in classroom management. Using routines and the ability to employ reduction, are the starting points for creative teaching (Jyrhämä, 2002, 74–77; Clark & Peterson, 1986, 279–280; Hogan, Rabinowitz & Carven III, 2003). One of the most difficult skills for novice teachers to acquire is knowledge of when to move away from structured routines and lead disciplined improvisation in education where the students partially guide the direction of the class (Saweyr, 2004, 2006). Inexperienced teacher students need routines, but they also need to learn how to flexibly apply them. Developing the skill of disciplined improvisation is at the centre of drama teaching and makes it challenging (Toivanen, Komulainen & Ruismäki, 2010).

2. Study design

2.1. Research problems and methods

The purpose of this study is to determine the challenges teacher trainees face in pedagogic and multimodal interaction during the drama lessons. Stimulated recall was used as a research method.

Stimulated recall has developed within the sphere of behavioural sciences and the method is often used in examining different social situations. In Finland stimulated recall has been used in examining the interaction, especially the teacher's pedagogic thinking and group situations (see for example, Kansanen, Tirri, Meri, Krokfors Husu & Jyrhämä, 2000). The Stimulated recall method is the application of the thinking-aloud method. In the stimulated recall method, the informant recalls the thinking process afterwards during an interview with an external

stimulant (for example, a picture, video, diary, or recording tape). In this case, the stimulant is a video of a drama lesson.

With the help of the Stimulated recall method, thinking processes can become visible. Stimulated recall is a useful method when the teacher's pedagogic decision-making is studied in the classroom. The Stimulated recall method has developed significantly from its historical starting point (Bloom, 1953). The method has advanced in both data collection and validation (see for example, Calderhead, 1981; Gass & Mackey, 2000; Lyle, 2003; Richard & Robin, 2008; Rowe, 2009; Vesterinen, Toom & Patrikainen, 2010; Yinger, 1986).

2.2. Subjects and material collection

Class teacher trainees conducted the examined and recorded drama lessons chosen for this article. Five of them had specialized in drama education and had completed 25 study points of a minor course in drama education. Two trainee teachers had completed a basic course of drama education (4 study points). All teacher trainees were familiar to the pupils, because they were the teachers who had been practising in those classes for a few weeks. In only one case did the trainee teacher work alone; in other lessons, trainee teachers' worked in pairs. Drama lessons included plays and drama techniques with physical work or discussion.

The material acquisition was carried out with the stimulated recall method. The interviews were carried out after sections from the videos to be studied had been chosen beforehand. The videoed lessons were described during the teacher practice in the spring of 2011. In the study, seven teacher trainees were interviewed.

The pupils were from the teacher training school's lower level of comprehensive school. They were preschool, 1st and 2nd graders. The video clips were from 1,5 minutes to 4 minutes long. After a video clip had been viewed, the interviewer and the interviewee discussed the classroom interaction they had observed on the video. Questions for the teacher trainees were the same after every clip: 1) How would you describe the interaction between you and a pupil in this situation? 2) Would you change your behaviour if you could teach the lesson again? How?

3. Results

According to the data analysis, class teacher students pointed out five main elements that make interaction in classroom drama teaching challenging: teacher's actions, educational organization, the nature of the subject, students, and resources. The main categories and their sub-categories are presented below in Figure 1. The results chapter is focused on the three first elements in the table: teacher's actions, organization of the educational situation, and the nature of the subject.

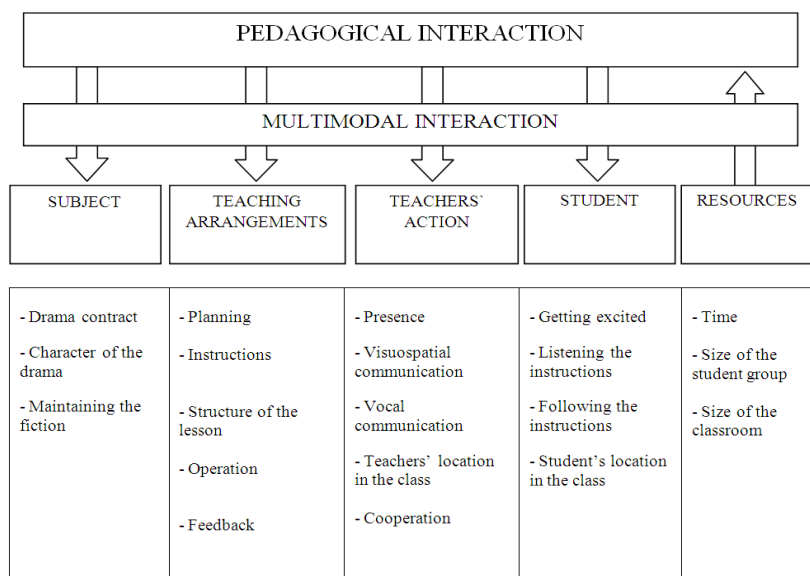


Fig. 1. The challenges of interaction in a drama lesson

Classroom drama teaching is a complex social phenomenon and it is necessary to study and discuss the drama teaching merely because of teachers' and students' pedagogical and multimodal interaction. From a research point of view, can pedagogical or multifunctional interaction in drama education be studied from the perspective of students (theory models of group structural factors) or from the perspective of teachers (pedagogic and multimodal teaching activities theories)? The selection of perspective will help understand the diverse views of the phenomenon. This research focuses on teacher's activities without forgetting the pupil's actions.

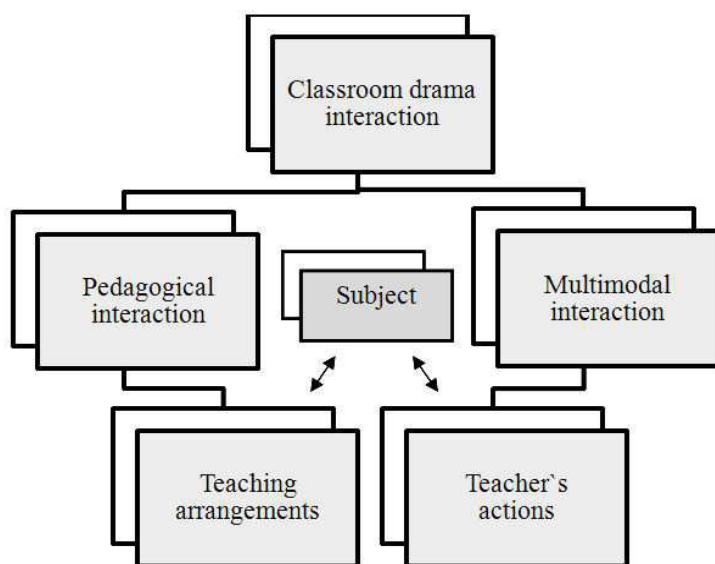


Fig. 2. Concept of the classroom drama interaction

In this study the challenges of the interaction which are related to the teacher's operations and to teaching arrangements (Figure 1) are divided under the concepts of pedagogical and multimodal interaction. Because drama lessons are studied, their special character is given to the interaction by the contents to be taught.

3.1. Teaching arrangements

In all interviews, the challenges of pedagogical interaction were mentioned and collected in the category *Teaching arrangements*. In this study the teaching arrangements include *planning* (pre-pedagogical interaction), *instructions*, *directing the actions*, *the structure of the lesson* and *feedback* (pedagogical interaction).

The interviewees reported that nearly all of their attention was directed at their own actions, because their pedagogical thinking and actions were not yet automatized. The interviewees reported that the lack of teaching experience and routines made the teaching complicated. Novice teachers seemed to place greater weight on their own performance, specifically to student misbehaviours encountered rather than the effectiveness of the learning environment (Allen and Casbergue, 1997). Drama teaching is a new experience for most of the teacher trainees and causes tension. Because most of the attention is directed to their own actions, the teacher's presence in the interaction situations was weak. The lack of presence reduced the interaction between the teacher and the student. The situational sensitivity was minor and thus the students' proposals were not really regarded. One trainee commented on the experience:

As a novice teacher and a teacher trainee there is so much to think about. I think about the things I am doing, I am going to do and things that are coming next.

To concentrate on the relation between the student and the content or on studying is the core of a teacher's profession. An ability to react to educational situations develops only gradually into a quick intuitive operation (Gladwell, 2006, 133–135). Intuitiveness is an important aspect of drama teaching. According to Goldberg (1983, 31; Shirley & Langan-Fox, 1996, Weintraub, 1998, 10–18), rational thinking both precedes and follows intuition; in other words, these two forms of handling information work in conjunction. Intuitive thinking helps the teacher when an activity reaches a state of dramatic incompleteness at which time he or she must react quickly to the proposals that arise from the groups' ideas and activities.

In the interviews, it appeared that the teacher-student interaction became more challenging if the lesson was not carefully structured (*pre-pedagogical interaction*). It is typical for novices to generate highly scripted and mentally well-rehearsed instructional strategies, where the class is seen as a whole and not as a group of individuals (Hogan et al., 2003). Teacher trainees claimed that a drama lesson should have a functioning rhythm. In some interviews, the teacher trainees thought that the rhythm was too slow because the students became tired and restless. In some interviews, the teacher trainees reported that the rhythm of the lesson was too fast and the students were unable to concentrate on the continuous stream of new instructions.

3.2. Teachers' actions

For the majority of the interviewees, attention was focused on the *teacher's actions in teaching situations*. They based their activities on their pedagogical background. Teacher trainees named the challenges that included the visuospatial interaction: teacher's nonverbal communication, presence and use of the body and space in an educational situation. Gestures, facial expressions, body posture and use of space may together be understood as constituting a visuospatial modality (Stivers & Sindell, 2005). The factors that are related to the teacher's peripheral communication, lifelessness or stiffness, appeared in all of the interviews. The failure to use the whole body and the lack of eye and touch contact were connected to this.

When I look at myself, I look like a statue there or something like that. I act like there's nobody around me. The interaction between me and the students should have been more active to all directions.

The drama teacher's communication style influences the way the whole group interacts. Particularly in the early stages of drama work, the teacher's presence and speech are of particular importance (Toivanen, Rantala & Ruismäki, 2009; Wales, 2009; Stinson, 2009; Howell & Heap, 2010; Toivanen, Pyykkö & Ruismäki, 2011). In order to obtain students' attention when needed, inspire students to the work of drama, and keep control of the progress, the trainee teacher has to use strengthened ways of vocal and visuospatial interaction. The teacher's role is more to facilitate than to teach in a traditional way. In most school subjects, the teaching-studying-learning interaction is easier to handle, because pupils' work, movement and verbal interaction in classrooms is strictly controlled by the teacher.

In classroom drama, teaching usually takes place in an open space where the desks and chairs are along the edge of the classroom. The meaning of the ways in which a teacher used space in the classroom appeared in all the interviews. In this study, *the teacher's use of space* refers to how the trainee teachers were placed in the classroom in relation to the students or the second teacher. Problems arose when teachers did not dare to go educational situations, but rather stayed away from the group. According to Hogan et al. (2003), novice teachers may have difficulties in managing such situations given a lack of experience, because many novices are unable to simply recall the events of misbehaviour. Beginners tend to focus their attention to only a narrow area of the classroom at the time.

The challenges in vocal multimodal interaction were related to *the communication between trainee teachers and pupils*. The vocal modality contains the means and the content of the teacher's speech (instructions, questions, concepts, and tone and strength of voice) (Stivers & Sindell, 2005). The inconsistency of the instructions led to problems with group management and controlling the actions in classroom. The students became frustrated and began to behave restlessly if they did not understand instructions or the goal of the actions they should be doing. According to Hogan et al. (2003), novices often present the information in a disorganized and disjointed manner. The interviewees claimed that there were problems in group management, especially in situations that included changing from drama work (scattered communication) to the teacher's instructions (centralized communication) (see Toivanen, Pyykkö & Ruismäki, 2011).

There were also unclear communications and responsibilities given to the other trainee teacher. The ambiguity in the communication between the teachers led to the fact that the teaching became a dialog between the trainee teachers in front of the class. The interviewees applied for the support from each other because the drama-teaching situation was new and exciting: *We were in that situation—only discussing between the two of us. We did not have any attention or interaction with the pupils.*

As said, these problems in multimodal interaction are connected to the pedagogical interaction. Before the drama lessons, the interviewees had made a clear plan of teaching actions and spheres of responsibilities. It was difficult to change the plans even if the progress of the drama lesson required it.

3.3. Subject

The third factor that the teacher trainees said affected the classroom interaction was connected to the teacher trainees' subject knowledge of classroom drama. Pedagogical content knowledge is defined as the ability to convey one's understandings of the content knowledge through multiple models of teaching for student understanding (Shulman, 1986). Classroom drama and the direction of the group are challenging for the trainee teacher because the drama processes require skills in drama methods and the abilities to be present in the dialogical process where the teacher has to listen to the group's suggestions (see Kara & Cam, 2007; Dickinson & Neelands, 2008). Successful drama work can be seen as an opportunity for mutual and nonverbal scattered communication in which the whole class can cooperate (cf. Erbay et al., 2010; Toivanen, 2010, 36–41; Hwang, 2006; Hui, 2006). The interviewees thought that strict discipline was not needed during a drama lesson because the nature of classroom drama always includes a certain kind of freedom. One trainee reported: *To maintain the fiction was difficult. When you try to keep discipline, the fiction will disappear.*

Another factor, which is linked to the character of drama, is connected to *maintaining the fiction*. The interviewees experienced it as challenging to work both in the role person (the teacher in a role) and as the teacher—especially in the above-mentioned disciplinary situations. The interviewees experienced giving feedback on students' actions as challenging in the role. Stepping out of the role makes the fiction disappear. The teacher combines the learning power of fictional situations (what if—fictional reality) that enable students as participators to take fictional roles (presentation) in situations and stories “as if” they were real. By using special drama techniques (still images) and roles, the teacher turns the fictional “what if” situations and stories into a living “as if” experience for pupils. The open space, pupils' and the teacher's actions between the fictional and the real world are the material for the drama lesson. A teacher using drama needs to be able to manage real and imaginary time, space and roles, and do so in both the social dimension of the classroom, the aesthetic dimension of the drama art form and the educational dimension of the school work (Neelands, 2009, 41–42; Toivanen, Pyykkö & Ruismäki, 2011).

A third issue that was connected to the subject was *a drama contract*. The teacher trainees claimed that because a drama contract was loose, it was not adopted as part of the drama work. A workable drama contract is a prerequisite for drama work and the learning power of fictional situations (what if - fictional reality). The drama contract should be an agreement in which the pupils and the teacher agree to work together in an empty space. The negotiation of a drama contract is creating a positive working environment.

4. Conclusions

Our drama teaching research project aims to produce theory-based knowledge to help trainee teachers to develop their inquiry-orientation in drama teaching. This study is based on the one central issue of Finnish Master's level teacher education. Finnish teacher education seeks to support student teachers as they construct their personal practical pedagogical theories. Through reflection on their actions in videotaped lessons, they found solutions to the challenging interaction situations in drama education. Reflection of pedagogical actions develops inquiry-oriented teachers, teachers who can integrate theoretical knowledge to practical educational situations (Jyrhämä & Maaranen, 2012). The aim is also to get trainee teachers to pay conscious attention to the multimodal part of the educational interaction. It is important to remember that the correct analysis and solution to all educational problems is not easy or predictable, because each classroom with students and each lesson is unique (Kagan, 1992).

According to the results of this study, two main factors affect the functioning of interaction in drama lessons. These two main categories are the teacher's actions and teaching arrangements (Table 1).

Table 1. The preconditions for the functional pedagogic interaction in drama

Teaching arrangements	Teacher's actions
Simplify the work	Use the whole body
Consider the instructions	Exercise lenience towards self
Use motivation	Be patient
Practise the use of time	Be present
Direct the attention to the students	Show situational sensitivity
Plan the use of space	Tolerate uncertainty
Increase subject knowledge	Tolerate incompleteness
	Demonstrate self-confidence
	Accept potential failure Show enthusiasm
	Be genuine
	Relax
	Experience

Both categories (Table 1.) include the skills necessary for classroom guidance, including management techniques, effective communication strategies and the assessment of student learning.

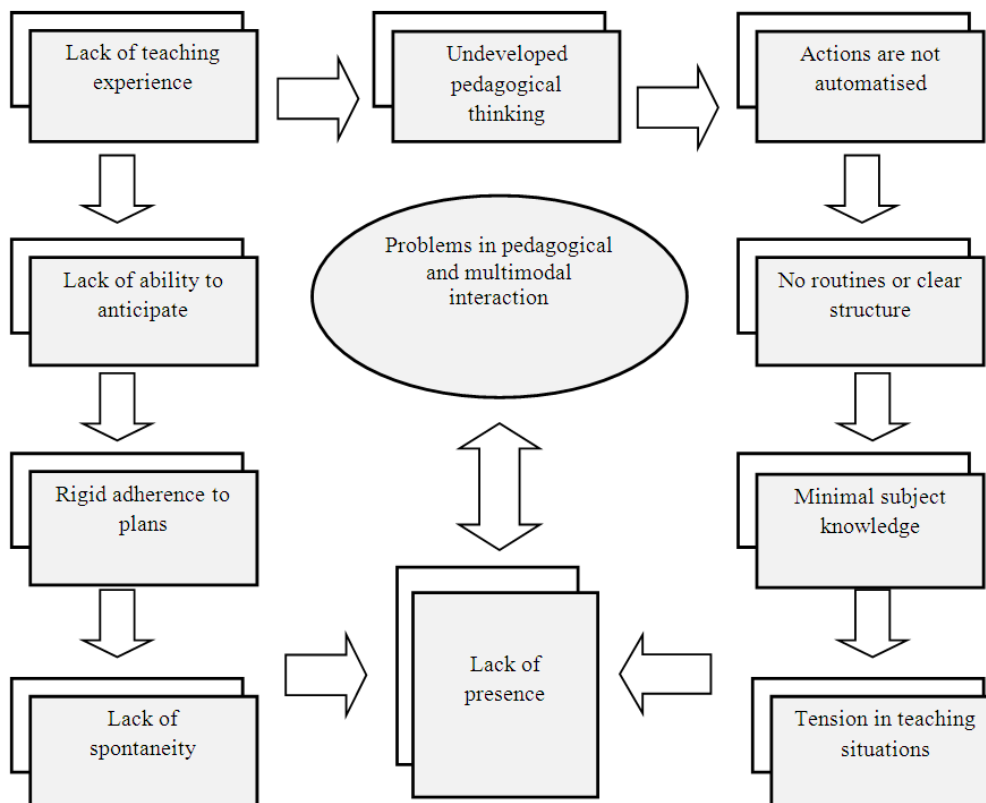


Fig. 3. Model of challenges in pedagogical and multimodal interaction

Figure 3 describes the complex relationships between teacher's understandings of content and pedagogy and actual pedagogical actions. The challenges of pedagogical interaction are also connected to the trainee teacher's multimodal actions. The lack of the teaching experience came out strongly in the interviews. This was expected because the research was performed in the department involved with teaching practice in the University of

Helsinki's class teacher education system. Inexperience was also related to the inability to anticipate students' actions (*Classroom Management*). The interviewees experienced that they had to plan the drama lessons very strictly because of their lack of experience. Strict adherence to the lesson plan led to a lack of presence, and other spontaneous difficulties in interaction (Sawyer, 2004). According to Jyrhämä & Maaranen (2012; Aaltonen and Pitkäniemi, 2001, 407), a teacher's pedagogical thinking is a very "here and now" approach to educational situations. Teaching is a series of constantly changing situations in which he or she must act immediately. It includes decision-making, spontaneous response, and intuition.

Theoretical and practical knowledge, the actual educational situations and the environment in which the teacher works affects a teacher's pedagogical decision-making. Teaching also includes the teacher's multimodal behaviour. With it, the teacher attempts to strengthen his or her educational purposes. The ability to simplify the complexity of educational situations, reduction, is one important way to survive complex learning situations. Reduction helps a teacher to deal with the flood of information and carry out pedagogical decision-making, pedagogical, and multimodal actions (Kansanen, 2009).

The teacher trainees experienced the stimulated recall interviews as useful to the development of their pedagogical thinking. Through reflection on their actions, they found solutions to the challenging interaction situations in drama education. Our findings support the use of video analysis of teaching situations as part of research-based teacher education aimed at developing inquiry-orientation in the teaching-learning process. The study also raises questions about how the video recordings are used and analysed in teacher training post-interaction reflection. Perhaps they should be used more video recordings in teacher training.

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